

"We're trying to provide a reliable database, which is accurate, so that it can be used appropriately to focus efforts on."

There are some restrictions, Dr. Reardon said: the roster cannot be sold to tobacco companies and it cannot be used to deceive doctors or the public. While they say sale of the master file brings about \$20 million in annual income to the association, officials would not say what they charge individual companies.

Much of the information in the association's database is available from sources scattered around the country. But one major element is not: the medical education number, which the A.M.A. assigns to new medical students in order to track them throughout their careers. Most doctors do not even know they have one.

This number, which enables computers to sort through the huge A.M.A. master file, is "the core element in the database of tracking physicians," said Douglas McKendry, a sales executive at the Axiom Corporation, a pharmaceutical marketing company that recently formed a partnership with the medical association to manage the database.

"The A.M.A. data helps identify the individual physicians that are being targeted," Mr. McKendry said.

Doctors who do not want their names sent to marketers can ask the association to remove them from the file, Dr. Reardon said. But in interviews, several prominent doctors said they were unaware that their biographies were being sold.

Among them is Dr. Christine K. Cassel, a former president of the American College of Physicians and chairman of the department of geriatrics at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in Manhattan. In Dr. Cassel's view, information about doctors' prescribing habits may appropriately be used by their health plans to improve quality of care. She called the commercial use of the data outrageous, saying, "This is not about quality. It's about sales."

DINNER AND A MOTIVE

Pharmaceutical marketing is big business not only for drug companies, but also for companies firms like I.M.S. Health and Axiom, which cater to them.

Overall spending on pharmaceutical promotion increased more than 10 percent last year, to \$13.9 billion from \$12.4 billion in 1998. Experts estimate that the companies collectively spend \$8,000 to \$13,000 a year per physician. In recent years, as demands on doctors' time have grown more intense, pharmaceutical marketers say they have been forced to become more creative.

"You have to have a hook," said Cathleen Croke, vice president of marketing for Access Worldwide Communications Inc., which specializes in drug marketing. "if you offer them \$250, that might get them. Or they are attracted to the prestige of being a consultant, that a company is asking for their opinion."

The offer of dinner and a \$250 consulting fee was sufficient to draw about a dozen South Florida physicians to Morton's in West Palm Beach on Sept. 18. They gathered there, on a muggy Monday night, in a back room called the boardroom, where a slide show and a moderator from Boron, LePore & Associates Inc., the market research firm hosting the event, awaited their arrival.

Dr. Moskowitz, who has been in practice in West Palm Beach since 1978 and heads a group of 12 doctors, says he routinely receives—and rejects—such invitations.

The Morton's dinner was not open to the public; had Dr. Moskowitz accepted, he would have been required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Instead, he told the companies he intended to take a reporter for The New York Times.

But when Dr. Moskowitz and the reporter showed up at Morton's, the Boron LePore moderator, Alexander Credle, told them to leave.

"This is a clinical experience meeting, a therapeutic discussion," Mr. Credle said. "There is an expected degree of confidentiality."

Dr. Moskowitz asked Mr. Credle why he was invited; Mr. Credle had no answer. But in an interview a few weeks after the dinner, John Czekanski, a senior vice president at Boron LePore, said the invitations were "based on databases targeting physicians" who prescribe cholesterol-lowering drugs or who might.

Boron LePore calls these dinner sessions "peer-to-peer meetings," and in 1997, it acted as host at 10,400 of them. Typically, they feature presentations from medical experts, on the theory that doctors are receptive to the views of their peers. With new drugs coming onto the market all the time, physicians are hungry for information about them. Pharmaceutical companies say it is that desire for education, rather than a free meal or modest honorarium, that draws many doctors to the meetings.

But the dinners are creating unease among officials of the American Medical Association's Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs, which in 1990 published guidelines that limit what gifts doctors may accept. The guidelines, which have also been adopted by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers' Association, the drug industry trade group, prohibit token consulting arrangements, but permit "modest meals" that serve "a genuine educational function."

Compliance is voluntary, and Dr. Herbert Rakatansky, who is chairman of the A.M.A.'s ethics council, says doctors routinely ignore the rules. That is in part because they are murky, as the dinner at Morton's reveals.

Whether the dinner was intended to educate doctors, or was part of a marketing campaign, or both, is not clear. In the \$7.2 billion market for the cholesterol-lowering drugs known as statins, Baycol ranks last in sales, with just \$106 million in sales last year. Bayer and SmithKline Beecham recently introduced a new dosage for the drug, and the companies said

"As far as we're concerned, it's educational," said Carmel Logan, a spokeswoman for SmithKline Beecham. But Tig Conger, the vice president of marketing for cardiovascular products at Bayer, said the company intended to teach a select group of doctors about Baycol, then use their feedback to hone its marketing message. And Allison Wey, a spokeswoman for Boron LePore, said the dinner was "part education and part marketing."

RAISING ETHICS QUESTION

While Dr. Rakatansky, of the A.M.A., could not comment specifically on the Baycol meeting, he had harsh words for these dinners in general.

"We think 99 percent of those are shams," he said. "They are marketing devices and not true requests for information."

As to whether the dinner fit the "modest meal" criteria, that, too, is unclear, because the guidelines offer no specifics. At Morton's in West Palm Beach, the entrees range from \$19.95 for chicken to \$32.95 for filet mignon—a la carte. The sales manager, Lauren Carteris, said the restaurant frequently was the site of pharmaceutical meetings for Boron LePore.

"Doctors," Ms. Carteris said, "will only go to an expensive restaurant."

To heighten doctors' awareness about the ethics of accepting gifts, the medical association is beginning an educational cam-

paign. In addition, The Journal of the American Medical Association devoted the bulk of its Nov. 1 issue to conflict of interest in medicine, including an essay entitled "Financial Indigestion" that questioned the effects of pharmaceutical company gifts on doctors' professional behavior.

But some prominent doctors say the medical association needs to address its own role, as a seller of information that helps drug marketers select which doctors to target.

"It potentiates this gift giving, and implicitly endorses it," said Dr. David Blumenthal, a professor of health policy at Harvard Medical School who has used the A.M.A.'s data for his academic research.

The sale of the master file to drug companies, Dr. Blumenthal said, "hands the weapon to the drug company that the A.M.A. is saying is an illicit weapon."

Dr. Reardon, the past president of the medical association, dismisses such a connection. Doctors are responsible for their own decisions about whether to accept gifts, he said, adding, "I don't think the database has anything to do with ethical behavior of physicians."

Dr. Reardon noted that drug marketers could obtain information about doctors from other sources, including the federal government. But Mr. Gostin, the privacy expert at Georgetown, who is also the health law and ethics editor of The Journal of the American Medical Association, said that did not justify the association's action.

"We live in a society where, if you comb long enough and hard enough with sophisticated enough search tools, you can find just about everything," Mr. Gostin said. "That doesn't mean it's all right for people to assemble it, make it easy and sell it."

As for Dr. Moskowitz, he is still receiving invitations from drug companies, despite his longstanding habit of spurning them. One arrived on Oct. 18, from Aventis Pharmaceuticals and Procter & Gamble Pharmaceuticals, who jointly market Actonel, an osteoporosis drug.

Attendance at the meeting, scheduled for Saturday, will be limited to 12 doctors, the invitation said. Breakfast and lunch will be served; in between, there will be a clinical discussion of osteoporosis, with 30 minutes reserved for doctors' feedback. The honorarium is \$1,000.

HONORING PILGRIM ARMENIAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

HON. GEORGE RADANOVICH

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 25, 2001

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church for its 100 years of service to the Armenian community. The church was founded with only fourteen members on January 26, 1901.

The first Armenian settlers to the area did not speak English. They formed the Armenian Congregational Church so they could worship together, in their native tongue. Although it started with small numbers, church membership has grown steadily over the years. In its 100 years, the church has had eight full-time pastors and several interim pastors who have